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'Brighter Outlook' on the way

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Help is at hand for those badly affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) caused by low levels of natural light.

Developing technology from the Met Office means that accurate forecasts of light levels are being used in a trial to help people with this common mental health problem during the dark winter months.

Registered patients are being invited to sign up for a pilot scheme in Cornwall that will test out the new health forecasting service.

'Brighter Outlook' is the project bringing together the Met Office, Outlook South West and NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly.

Initially, the scheme will seek to evaluate the effect for 200 people who sign up for the programme, and will run form 1 February 2009 for three months. If successful, the project will be extended to a larger number of people in the autumn.

Dr Tish Laing-Morton, Met Office clinical director, said: "Our knowledge of the link between the weather and our health is becoming deeper and this latest initiative is one more example of how we can help people manage their condition to remain well. We hope this pilot brings real benefit and provides the platform to extend schemes to even more people."

Kevin Simpson, Partner at Outlook South West and Chartered Clinical Psychologist, said: "We are very excited about this project. Outlook South West provides psychological therapy to over 12,000 people in Cornwall and we encounter many people for whom the weather over the winter months is a serious issue. This pilot scheme combines innovative emerging science developed by the Met Office with evidence-based practice that we are confident will deliver measurable health benefits to the people of Cornwall".

Notes to editors

- Participants who sign up for the scheme receive an assessment from a psychological therapist, portable light box and cognitive behavioural therapy self-help information. An e-mail, SMS text message or an automated phone message will alert members to periods of reduced light levels, advising them to begin or continue light treatment, while making use of the self-help material.